Institutionalised Schooling

'Why fucking up in school isn't just your fault'

Underground
Schools
Project
WA

This book isn't about sexy robots and I am very sorry…

If this has somehow made it into your hands, I firstly want to say sorry that this isn't the book you thought it was. There are no tales of intrigue, no sexy mysterious strangers, no dragons to fight and no sensationalised lies. If you want to learn more about schools, why they don't work and how to make things better, please keep reading. If you're looking for sexy robot adventures, I suggest passing this book onto a friend and go on a search for your attractive android.

The idea behind this book is to teach high school students about the education system, its history, how it works and how it's broken. We want to teach you this because we feel that the truths of the educational system are often hidden and unexamined, and when school fails students, the students often unfairly take the blame. This is us trying to take our power back from schools and give it to the students. We want you to know why it doesn't work, to question the system, to learn that there are better ways and most importantly: to know that not liking and not doing well in school is not because of you. It's the schools that are failing you, not the other way around.

So please: read, learn and question everything. Question your teachers, your school and yourselves. Please pass this book on after your done and add your own notes in the back, we want as many students as possible to start their own school revolution and change the way they think about education.

Read me and then pass me on to a friend!

Who are we?

We are a group of researchers from Kwinana, Rockingham and Mandurah/Peel regions. We research education and inequalities, trying to find links between structures of schooling and inequality and unfair educational outcomes. We truly believe in every student's ability to learn and become successful with or without school, regardless of socioeconomic status, race or gender. This book is both our way of reporting back our research into the community and an effort to help students fight back against oppressive school systems and recognise their ability to be critical thinkers, active risk takers and people who can make a difference in their own communities, schools and lives.

We are currently doing this anonymously as we are unsure about possible backlash from this book, however, if you want to get in contact with us and learn more, contribute to any ongoing research, or have a look at ways we could possibly help you on your own journeys we have some contact info below.

For now though you can call us,

K.P, M.S and team

Underground School Project WA

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Schools: A History

It is a requirement of modern developed societies (think Australia, US, UK ect.) that they have an educational system in place. The idea of the modern school: free compulsory education for all children is a relatively modern one.

Schools as we know them where invented in the industrial era to meet the needs of the new capitalist economy.

Schools are a modern invention, they were created during the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution was a time of great change in the world and how societies worked. The industrial revolution was driven by a change in technologies available (steam engine, electricity) and how people worked. Before the industrial revolution people worked in family businesses, your father was a blacksmith and he taught you how to be a blacksmith so you can teach your own son. Children were taught at home by their parents and learnt skills for adult life, such as work, from their parents too. This changed when people started working in factories, parents could no longer teach their children or look after them at home. People worked in factories and assembly lines. This maximised profits, but greatly changed families. The working classes moved into city slums and worked all day, factory owners exploited their workers, families got poorer while the rich got richer and because the adults worked all day, children either ran wild without supervision or where forced into jobs at a really young age.

When thinking about the industrial era, think about '*Oliver Twist', 'Scrouge'* and '*Sherlock*'… It was dark, grimy and overall pretty crappy time to be anyone not rich.

This is time schools where invented for, and they haven't changed much since. Schools where invented for two reasons.

One: To keep children off the streets. Due to parents being in factories, nobody was watching the kids and someone needed to '*baby sit'.* This idea is still used today, and perhaps you have heard people say '*at least if keeps them off the streets'* when talking about school? Yep, it's true and one of the main reasons why school was invented.

Two: To separate out the factory workers and the factory managers. The big idea of schools was to work out who was 'smart enough' to run the factories when they grew older and who would have to work in the assembly lines because they were not 'good enough' to be in charge. Schools sorted lower class kids out from middle class kids and taught them to be good workers. Factories and schools have many similarities because of this: following rules, the timetables and bells, being sorted by subject. Schools were invented to help lower class people become conformist and good factory workers to help the economy of the Victorian era and they continue to work on the same framework today.

Schools in Australia

If you're reading this you should probably have a pretty decent idea about what Australian schools are like, given that you're an Australian school student but just in case this book has made its way to another country, we will give you a brief run through about what Australian schools are like and how they are run.

Australia has compulsory education for all children between the ages of five until fifteen (although some states its seventeen) when you start school all depends on your birthdate and what state or territory you live in. Australia has had compulsory schooling since federation in 1902, but has a history of schooling since before Australia 'officially' became a country, in 1880, when New South Wales instituted free, secular and compulsory education. This system was built upon the religious catholic and protestant school systems in place at the time.

Full time school attendance in Australia was not instantaneous and before World War II, nearly half of all Australian students didn't attend high school. This improved afterwards and by the 1970's most students attended high schools for at least four years.

University attendance in Australia was very low until after World War II was well. The combination of prolonged participation in high schools by Australian students, societal pressure and schemes to make university attendance accessible by all, such as the Whitlam Government enabling free university education for all, had caused a much larger population to attend universities and other tertiary institutions. In 1913 only 2% of Victorian students went onto university, where in 1998, Australian wide around 15% of students went on to further education after high school.

Currently, the Australian Educational systems are run by the state governments. The state governments pays for schools, and decides upon the curriculum. That said since 2012 Australia has been creating the 'Australian National Curriculum' which will make all schools in Australia, regardless of where you are, have to teach you the same thing. The Australian National Curriculum is in a transition phase and has been implemented for some subjects, whilst others are still being debated and reviewed before implementation.

Australia has three levels of schooling: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary.

Pre-primary/prep is not compulsory and are not very regulated. That said, where and what level of pre-primary you do is dependent on which state you are in.

Primary and secondary school are compulsory and regulated.

Tertiary is universities and TAFEs, they are partially funded through the government through HECS-HELP scheme. Pre-HECS-HELP university attendance in Australia was free for all. Currently if you decide to attend university, you will need to pay for it usually through HECS-HELP or upfront. TAFE is either paid straight up or through the VET-HELP scheme, which is similar to HECS-HELP.

Australian education systems are rated very highly around the world. In 2009 Australia was rated as 6th for reading, 7th for science and 13th in math in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Australia rates 2nd currently (2015) in the UN Education index, just behind Norway.

Australian schools are very similar to many other developed countries schools in how they work, and are currently being steered towards a more 'American' based system with lots of standardised testing such as the NAPLAN. There is a larger focus on the Maths, Sciences and English subjects within Australian schools with political pushes towards more math and English.

Schools in Rockingham, Kwinana, Mandurah and Peel

If you have ever heard or said the following:

"I can't do it Miss, I'm from Rockingham/Kwinana/Mandurah, I'm stupid"

You're not alone. I have heard it, had it said to me, I have joked around that I'm a Bogan or lesser because I live around here. And I have quite a few things, both good and bad to say about this area.

Firstly, Kwinana and Rockingham is my home. It's the best place I have ever lived in, and I have lived a lot of places. The beach is beautiful, I love all the trees, the houses are cheap and it's not that far from the city. I haven't always lived in this area, but I have always been happy to be here. I would get strange reactions though when I told people I lived around here, I'm sure you have too. Snobby ladies look at me like I'm trash, friend's joke that I'm going to get robbed and people at job interviews seem disinterested when I say that I live here. It sucks and it's really wrong and unfair.

People within Kwinana/Rockingham/Mandurah and Peel are not any less worthy or any more stupid than anyone else in Western Australia. Nobody has poisoned our water supply to make us all lesser. I will say that it true that we are the victims of the system here, we are not as rich as other suburbs and they tell us it's our fault. What's worse is that we believe that when it's just not true

Our area is a low socioeconomic area. We have high rates of unemployment and some of the highest rates of youth unemployment in Australia. Schools in our region have reoccurring issues with students dropping out, not paying attention and not achieving grades 'high enough' for the students. School students within Kwinana, Rockingham, Warnbro and Mandurah have some of the lowest chances of going to uni. Do you know why?

Do you think it's because we are stupid?

It's actually because the schools don't offer the classes that will let you get an ATAR here. You have one class for an ATAR subject spread around several schools, that one class of twenty out of thousands of kids! Statistically the chance that you will get an ATAR high enough here, even if you do very well, is very low.

On top of that, there are no real universities in the area. In Rockingham there is the Murdoch University Rockingham campus, however, they closed their undergraduate programs and only have research programs and a university enabling program there now. Meaning that if you want to go to uni, you need to travel up to Murdoch or further up.

That doesn't mean that there isn't hope. That you shouldn't try for something better just because the system is working against you. That's why we wrote these books, why we are sneaking them into schools. We want you to know how unfairly you are being treated. How you are being lied to when they say it's your fault and to try to show you how to take action and not let yourself become another victim to the broken system.

A teacher's view!

I've worked in schools in this region for a number of years and I think the hardest thing to have to deal with is not 'at-risk' young people but the lowered expectations that teachers have of students in this region

I've heard other teachers call students racist terms such 'lazy coconuts', or derogatory terms such as sluts or dicks, or 'thick' or criminals. You name it I've heard teachers say it. When there is a problem in schools teachers ***always*** blame the students. I've never heard a teacher say that they should change their ways and be better teachers but it's common to hear them talking about how students need to improve and try harder.

What I think that teachers never think about is how the system works to keep poor students poor and rich students rich. When you live in this region most teachers think that all we're good for is a low paid job. It's not true. If you're not given a chance in the first place then no one can succeed.

What is sociology?

Ok, so it important for you to know a little about sociology and how to think sociologically in order to understand this book and in order to think critically about schools.

Sociology is the study of society. It is the study of social behaviours, of societal problems, and society. Sociologists look at how societies develop, how social problems such as unemployment occur, they study institutions such as education and economics and look at all the connections between society, institutions, social problems and culture. Sociology is like that Wikipedia game where you try to get to 'Hitler' in 7 clicks, but instead of horrible dictators you have , human behaviour, intuitions, societal issues and stuff…. Ok, and some dictators.

However, hopefully you get my point. It's all about the connections… Who would have guessed midnight Wikipedia binges would have actually been relevant for something!

Sociology is what this book is about, we are making the connections between our society and schools. We are connecting the capitalism with deep and unquestioned beliefs that help schools be what they are today. But before we move onto our critical analysis of 'why schools suck' a little bit on how to think sociologically

Sociological Imagination: How to think like a sociologist 101

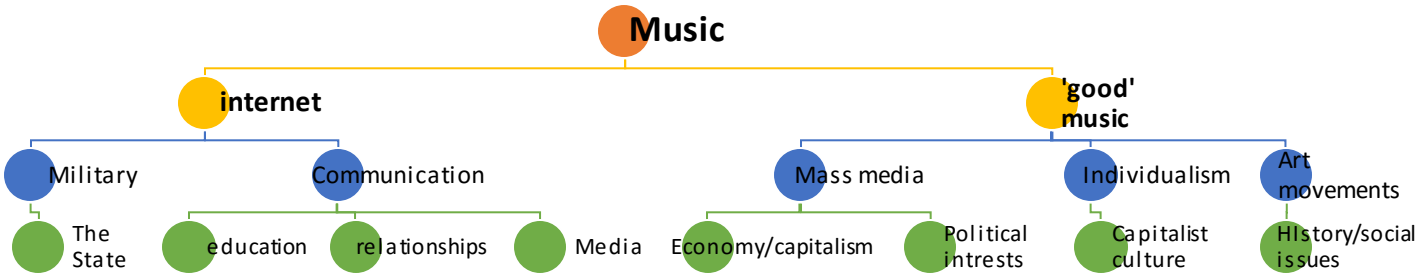
So, Sociology is a big and fancy field of study. People become professors of sociology and spend their lives in tweed elbow patches based on this stuff… teaching this very section to undergraduates in huge lecture halls, usually very badly. I'm going to do this better and you are going to become a badass expert by the end of this book.

Lets do this!

Sociological imagination is a way of thinking using sociology. It was 'invented' by an American sociologist in the 1950's called C. Wright Mills. Basically the sociological imagination is a way of thinking to try and see all the connections between social institutions.

Imagine your own life and all the things that have influenced you, music, politics, art. Everything that influences you, good or bad, is in turn influenced by other things. Take music for example, the invention of the internet has changed how we access music. We now listen and watch online and in very easily accessible ways. The internet in turn has affected how we think and communicate around the world, influencing politics, art, healthcare, military ect. Music is also influenced by social issues that are occurring at the time and cultural ideas about what is 'good' music. Cultural ideas about what is 'good' music are subtle and are influenced by trends and ideologies that currently run in the culture. In Australia we live in a capitalist society which has ideals such as individualism, which is a focus on the worth of individuals rather than groups. We can see this in both big and small ways in our music, small things like experimentation and creative endeavours could be taken up because an artist believes in individual worth, or big break up songs where 'you don't need to put up with crap because your amazing' where the messages of individualism are more obvious.

In picture form it would look a little like this:



Using your sociological imagination is all about finding those connections!

Why we use the sociological imagination isn't just so we can have a deeper understanding of society, but so we can use our understanding of society to make positive changes in the world and to help those around us.

We do not use our sociological powers for evil

What is Capitalism?

Capitalism is an economic system. Basically it's a free market, in which people and businesses are free to make as much profit as possible without government interference. It's a 'hands off' way of dealing with the economy where the government doesn't interfere and businesses try to create as much profit as possible. Capitalism started off because people were upset at the monarchy and aristocracy having too much control over business and land, thus people felt that an economy without control from the state (government/monarchy) would be best and lead to better and more stable economy. In capitalist societies, businesses make their own decisions and own their properties and goods, which are then sold for profit. Capitalism has caused great economic growth and has helped build some of the most powerful societies within modern times. However, capitalist systems are not without criticisms. Capitalist systems, cue to their free market nature have little regulation and often fall victim to corruption, greed and exploitive actions in order to make more profit. Capitalism has caused greater social stratification between socioeconomic classes and for a majority of the worlds wealth and goods to belong to only a few people (think: occupy wall street movement). Capitalism also has further reaching effects beyond business. Conservative political institutions often act in the best interest of capitalist systems, giving tax breaks to big businesses because they believe that a stronger economy will best protect people. Capitalist economic models depend on competition for both businesses and for workers, so within unregulated capitalist economies, small businesses and workers often struggle to survive. In fact, for a capitalist system to survive, a certain number people need to be unemployed, or else there would not be enough competition between workers to be able to create goods.

In Australia we have a capitalist economy, however, we also have elements of regulation called trade laws to help protect smaller businesses, other laws such as consumer protection and workers rights help protect customers and workers from negative aspects of capitalist economies such as exploitation and greed. Capitalism has both its strengths and weaknesses and we encourage you to learn further about the issues (check out the links).

Capitalism Playlist

History of Capitalism

Adam Smith

Wealth of Nations E-book

Marxism 101

Marxism is a set of political and economic ideas that originate from a guy called Karl Marx. Karl Marx was a very interesting man with a huge beard whose life's work centres on capitalism and looking critically on capitalist systems. Karl Marx spent his life looking at the issues the capitalism creates such as the exploitation of workers, the increasing social stratification between social classes (the rich get richer and the poor get broke as f*$k) and the harm that capitalism has done to other social institutions such as family. Karl Marx created an antithesis (opposite) to capitalism with his book The Communist Manifesto. Marxism is the forerunner to communist political and economic systems and essentially believes in having all means of economic production (businesses, schools ect.) owned by the state so everything can be shared equally between everyone. Marxism works towards every person, from doctors to garbage men being equals, and the abolishment of social class.

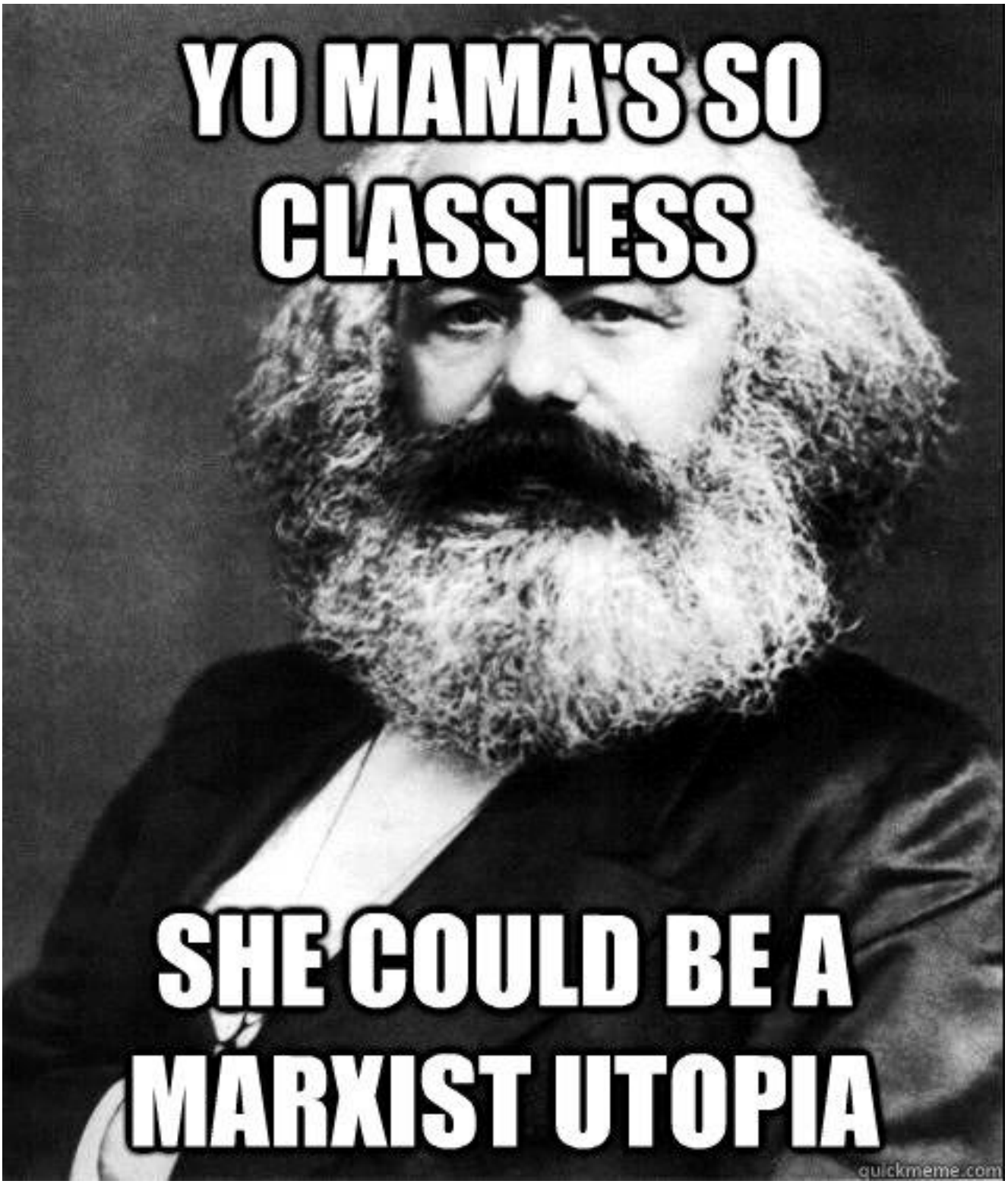
Marxs ideas had a lot of influence in the early 20th century and led onto what is currently known as communism within countries such as China, Cuba, Vietnam and the former USSR. However Marxism not only influenced communism but also other political views, such as Social Democracy and Reformist Socialism. What all of these have in common is the idea of positive freedom, that the state needs to take action to create a world in which everyone has the same chance of success. That in order to be truly free to pursue our lives, we all need an equal chance of success. In order to achieve that equal chance, sometimes the state needs to intervene.

Many Marxists say that modern "Communism" is not true Communism at all. That nations such as USSR, The People's Republic of China, Cuba, and Vietnam are different forms of Capitalism, often with heavily "nationalized" industries. These regimes are criticised by Marxists as becoming corrupt and being exploitive of their citizens and ultimately not following Marx's teachings.

Regardless of what you personally think about Marxism and Karl Marx's teachings, he is very influential and important figure in political theory.

Karl Marx

The Communist Manifesto


YO MAMA'S SO CLASSLESS
SHE COULD BE A MARXIST UTOPIA
quickmeme.com

Agency vs Structure

In sociology there is an ongoing debate about what has more influence on our choices, ourselves or our culture that we grew up in. This debate is called agency vs structure. Some people believe that all our choices are driven by ourselves, our will, determination, choices and behaviour are entirely our own. This is what people refer to as agency. Some people disagree with this viewpoint that agency is what drives human behaviour and take a more structural view point. They believe that human thinking, behaviour, emotions and choices are influenced by the society that you live in, in often unconscious ways, that in the end influence your behaviour and who you are greatly. Structural viewpoints still believe that agency exists, just that it can be heavily influenced by society. So, for example, you are really thirsty and you want a coke. Do you really want the coke just because you do and you have chosen to have it, or because subconsciously society tells you when you're thirsty, you should have something sweet/sugary or you need to buy something to not be a cheapskate who drinks only water. Is your choice to drink a coke truly your own?

We have used this debate to create a tool for understanding social issues using these key ideas within sociology in an easy way. This tool (our agency vs structure grid) is meant to help you deconstruct what you think is going on and help you think critically and notice key patterns of how people think and address social problems. It works by asking two questions: Is the behaviour driven by agency or structure? And what should be done to address the issue?

Anyway, it looks like this:

Revolution (change)

Agency **Structure**

Regulation (order)

Structure vs Agency continued…

So, lets run through an example of how to use it and feel free to draw in your answer, the more people who draw in answers as the book gets passed around and read, the more information you can begin to see.

So, Students who are bored and don't do their work in school (something called disengagement), Is their behaviour driven by their own choices, (i.e. agency) or is their behaviour influence d by the school and structural problems, perhaps they can't connect with lessons well because the department of education says you have to learn something in a boring way (e.g. structure). So, at this point, you decide what you think influences being bored in school more. You don't need to choose extremes and can be somewhere in-between agency and structure if that's what you think.

The next part is to ask yourself, what do you think should be done about the issue? Should schools or students have more rules and regulation to fix the issue, do we need more order? (regulation) or do we need something to change, do we need to change how students learn, how schools work to fix the problem? (revolution). Once again, it doesn't need to be about extremes, but abou t what you think should be done.

After a while you of using the structure vs agency grid you begin to see patterns about what people think, how society works and also you begin to automatically start viewing problems and breaking them down this way too. It makes it easier to critically view and question.

A couple of patterns that we have noticed in using the structure/agency grid in our research. Feel free to add any of your own observations too!

1. Conservative people/institutions/places tend have stronger views towards human agency, We theorise that this isn't because they believe in the will of the people, as much as it is that they like the current structures and don't want to acknowledge the faults in systems. i.e. its easier to blame individuals then look at the faults in the system
2. People at opposite sides (especially those on the extremes) will often have really different political views and can outright argue about it all the time… full on war
3. Using agency vs structure grid makes you more aware of the issues and helps improve your critical sociological skills
4. It's fun to make a super big agency vs structure rug and play sociological twister…. Right hand on Marxism, left hand deficit ideology!
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Sociological theories to know!

In this book we will talk about some theories that are relevant to education and how the structure hurts students, however, there are some relevant theorists and cool sociological ideas that you can learn that will help you understand better about what we are talking about and how institutions/societies work.

These are QR codes to interesting YouTube videos about different sociologists/political theorists/philosophers/history of institutions/info you should look at that can help you get a better understanding. They should be about ten minutes each, but you don't need to watch them all at once.

Karl Marx (known for: Marxism, Communism, Cool beards)

Michel Foucault (known for: philosophy of Power and Control, a different way to look at history) WARNING: NSFW (erotic art pictures, keep away from teachers and little people)

Next page….

History of work **(known for: the reason why teachers say you need good grades, why people are bitchy to people in retail)**

History of Capitalism **(known for: monopoly man, the stock market)**

There are heaps of cool videos and things to look at and learn, But for now these are the ones you'll want to know. For the rest of the book we will add in QR codes and bits and pieces to google and learn more and provide additional context. If you start to really get into sociology, we will put a reference list in so you can start to look at academic articles and texts as well. No pressure!

What does the SAT really test?

Do upvotes show the problems of democracy?

What are the 'Big Issues' in education (from the schools perspective)?

Disengagement:

Disengagement is when students stop paying attention in class, become bored and don't learn. This can also lead to students becoming disruptive. Teachers and student teachers are told to try and fix this problem by creating more interesting lessons, to include more group activities and more pictures. It's also common for teachers to punish students for not paying attention in class.

You might notice if we are thinking back to our structure vs agency that solutions for disengagement focus towards the agency of the individuals or small actions within the classroom. Real solutions for disengagement need to address the cause of why students get bored and disengage within schools beyond boring lessons, but structural issues that also contribute towards disengagement.

Drop Out

Dropping out, is a problem in which students stop attending school and leave education altogether. Sometimes students leave for employment, however, other times students stop attending school altogether without other options/spaces to go to. The reasons why students leave school are complex and often students who drop out are viewed as 'less'. In universities, student teachers are told to create a interesting and supportive environment for students so they won't want to leave, however, this is rarely carried out within schools and people who are at risk of dropping out are often viewed as lessor and pushed away from school by poor treatment and lack of acceptance. Who wants to stay in school and get yelled at by teachers anyway?

Jeff Duncan-Andrade: Drop Out

Raise Up: The Drop Out Crisis

http://bit.do/dropout

Absenteeism

Absenteeism, or wagging is a common problem for teachers to deal with. Much like dropping out there are many varied reasons for why someone might wag school. Sometimes people wag due to family commitments, due to prolonged disengagement in lessons, due to mental health issues or reoccurring bullying. Those who wag school are often viewed as trouble makers and schools will punish those caught wagging. In some cases law enforcement will be called in if you are caught outside of school during school hours, and many shops will refuse to serve school age persons during school hours in an attempt to force them back to school. This rejection of students will often exacerbate the issue and cause reoccurring problems.

Lack of Achievement

The students who tough it out and stay in schools still deal with reoccurring issues and this often impacts a student's ability to achieve academically within schools. Test scores are used to show teachers how well someone is doing in school and many students don't reach up to standard. You may be failure with NAPLAN? Schools are increasing standardised testing and are often teaching to the test to increase test scores for political reasons such as increased funding and kudos from within the educational systems. It's somewhat similar to a paper and pen gladiator battle so the schools can show off their "smartest" student as a badge to show that they have the better school. The amount of time given to NAPLAN testing and other exam often hurts genuine learning time and there are many people who doubt the validity and reliability of these tests. In addition within schools most assessments lack authenticity and connection to student's interests or real world application of the topic, which make assessment tasks more difficult and a pain in the ass. Students who have issues with lack of achievement may feel as I they are stupid and teachers may treat them as less worthy of attention/time. However, in most cases the lack of achievement will be a combination of poor schooling environment leading to disengagement and unreliable and inauthentic methods of testing.

NAPLAN

Authentic Assessment

What does the education system really do?

Forced conformity

So, this is the part of this book where we really get into this and start to look critically at educational systems. We will want to look at some of the theories and sociological perspectives on educational systems and to try and answer the question:

'What is school for?'

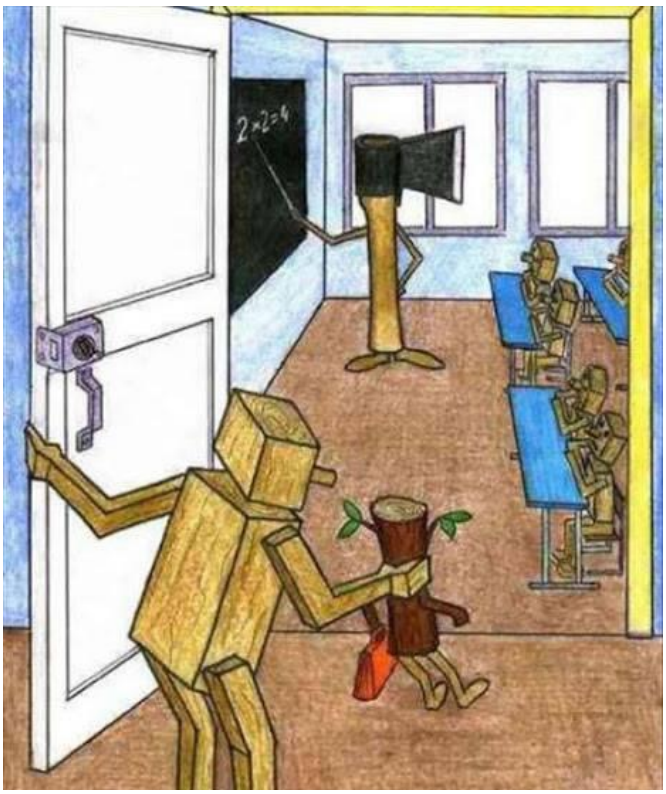
I'm sure a lot of you believe that school is for learning, for helping you get a job in the future or being prepared for adulthood, and to a smaller extent that is true, however, there is good reason to believe that the main purpose of school is something very different. A French sociologist and Moustache man, Emile Durkhiem said that the major function of school is to transmit society's norms and values. He said :

"Society…. Cannot exist except on the condition that all of its members are sufficiently alike- that is to say, only on the condition that they all reflect, in differing degree, the characteristics essential for a given ideal, which is a collective idea"

What this is saying is that a society can not run unless all people believe and act in the same way, we need to agree and understand social norms and accept them. If a majority of people did not agree or accept societal norms and beliefs current systems would not work and society would be forced to change.

Schools are the place to learn societal norms in order to achieve a peaceful on cohesive society. We can view school as a mini society in which children learned how to interact with others and become socialised into becoming acceptable for wider society, that students learn not only subjects but behaviours and beliefs that they take on as their own. School is the ultimate tool for conformity, in order to be successful, we need to be shaped into someone we never agreed to become.

Ken Robertson: Changing Education Paradigms



We can look at this process of conformity in a similar way to prisons. In highly controlled environments, where you have your time dictated and you become isolated from the world, you become normalised in a process called institutionalisation. In prisons it becomes normal to have people dictate your life, your become used to prison hierarchy, gangs and guards and it begins to shape how you think and act. Usually when people leave prison systems they have a difficult time reintegrating into wider society again, and it's not only prisons that do this, but people who leave the military or have spent long periods of time in hospitals. Our contention is that school does the same thing. Schools institutionalise people.

This is the biggest issue with Institutionalised schooling is that schools punish and destroy those who are different. Many of the issues within schooling such as drop outs, disengagement, absenteeism, is much higher in those who are considered different from these accepted norms. The statistics show that if you are poor, disabled, of the 'wrong' race, gender or sexuality, you are much more likely to suffer in schools as a result.

Schools punish those who are different in an attempt to shape people into accepted norms. If schools and society predetermine who you are and meant to be, if you fit outside these norms you are rejected and the blame is often put on the individuals for 'failing' rather than society and school for having unobtainable standards for all, or does not have the authority to make these decisions for others.

One of the things about schools enforcing and shaping a conformist society is the lack of awareness and permission. That people have not given schools permission to shape children to become obedient and quiet 'yes men'. Instead of being told what school is for, we are told that it is for learning and preparation for adulthood, and these reasons hide and distract away from the enforced conformity into believing that it is for 'our own good'.

"I have not given my school permission to decide my life for me. I have never said it was ok for them to try and change who I was. I couldn't change who I was, who I am, so they rejected me. I never disengaged from school, school disengaged from me."

Another big question about the institutionalisation of school is why. Why would they do this? And what do they have to gain?

The answer is rather simple, money and power. Educational systems are among the most conservative and in order for our current institutions to stay the same, students need to learn and unquestionably accept the institutions as they are. Our economic system is capitalist and in order for economic systems to stay the same, people need to be obedient workers, and those who can not be employed need to believe it is their own 'fault'.

Émile Durkheim

Hidden 'Covert' Curriculum

Schools have been a method for socialising children into becoming the norm for a long time. How is it that they achieve this?

> *'If capitalism is to succeed it requires a hard-working, docile, obedient and highly motivated workforce that is too divided and fragmented to challenge the authority of management. The education system helps achieve these objectives largely through the hidden curriculum'*

Essentially it's all the little unsaid things that shape us and help build students into ideal workers. The hidden curriculum is what teachers teach us but remains unsaid. It's not the content of the lessons, but how people teach, the rules and how schools are organised. By attending school students pick up small things, such as having to line up outside, raise your hand to ask a question, wear a uniform and have a shirt tucked in, no talking ect… all the small rules and acts add up to help shape students into becoming the 'norm'. The hidden curriculum is never explicitly stated by the school or teachers, however, it is a very present and powerful shaping force that is made more powerful by the large amount of people unaware and who don't question.

The hidden curriculum is said to help create a subservient workforce. Some research shows that grades are linked to personality traits rather than abilities. Low grades were linked to creativity, aggressiveness and independence and higher grades are linked to consistency, dependability and punctuality.

We often hear 'hallmark' ideals behind education about it broadening minds and help people develop a firm sense of self, however, educational systems really create unimaginative and unquestioning workforces, who are easier to manipulate.

The hidden curriculum also helps people accept authority. Schools are organised in a hierarchy of who has more power. Principals > Teachers > Students. The Hidden curriculum teaches people to accept and become used to having little control over their own lives and accept others having power over them.

Schools are also structured in a way that students learn to become motivated by external factors. By having external awards and a structure that does not allow time/space and adequate involvement for students to develop internal motivation. Instead of learning for fulfilment, curiosity and joy, we learn because of grades, qualification and mandatory attendance.

The hidden curriculum also normalises people to the fragmentation of their lives. Schools are divided into separate subjects and there is very little connection made between the subjects. For example, there is very little connection made between social studies, English and art within schools, when in the wider world they are very connected with each other. This fragmentation of knowledge mirrors the fragmentation of the workforce in capitalist societies. Jobs are broken down into specific tasks (think factory lines in the most extreme form) where you do not get to see a bigger picture or interact with others. School helps prepare you for this and be accepting of the specialisation of the work force.

Education and Cultural Capital

Schools value some types of knowledge, objects and behaviours more than others. Teachers usually come from white middle-class (fairly wealthy) backgrounds and when they teach they often have little knowledge or understanding of the daily reality of their students' lives. For example teachers will often give homework to students that have to babysit younger siblings or work so that the family can earn enough income to survive. When teachers and education systems value one type of lived experience over others then culture becomes a commodity (something of worth that you exchange) and middle class students have better access to an education that works for them but marginalises others. We call this cultural capital.

We also have social capital networks. These networks are the people we know that can help us get further in life. They might be able to help us get a job, or go to university or fill out forms for Centrelink, or apply for bank loans. Once again if you are from the middle classes then you are more likely to have a social capital network that helps you to get a better education, higher paid jobs and access to better opportunities.

Education systems are unfair! Everybody should have equal access to all opportunities in life. We should value everybody's families, cultural experiences and knowledge. That would make a socially just society. Lots of us don't want to be like rich wankers – they can be dicks. Our families are fantastic no matter how much money they have. People who have less money often have each other's backs, are survivors and have a lot to offer our world. If you don't want to have others use power and control to tell you to be the same as everyone else and say 'fuck school' and fight back. This doesn't make you a criminal. We'd argue it makes you a revolutionist.

Cultural capital theory:

Cultural capital: Middle class stuff, rich parents, parents and family connections which make it easier for you to go through school

Social capital: Who you know and your social environments

Navigational capital: How you can navigate from lower SES to becoming middle class

Resistant Cultural Capital: Culture and actions that fight back against cultural capital norms and 'the man'

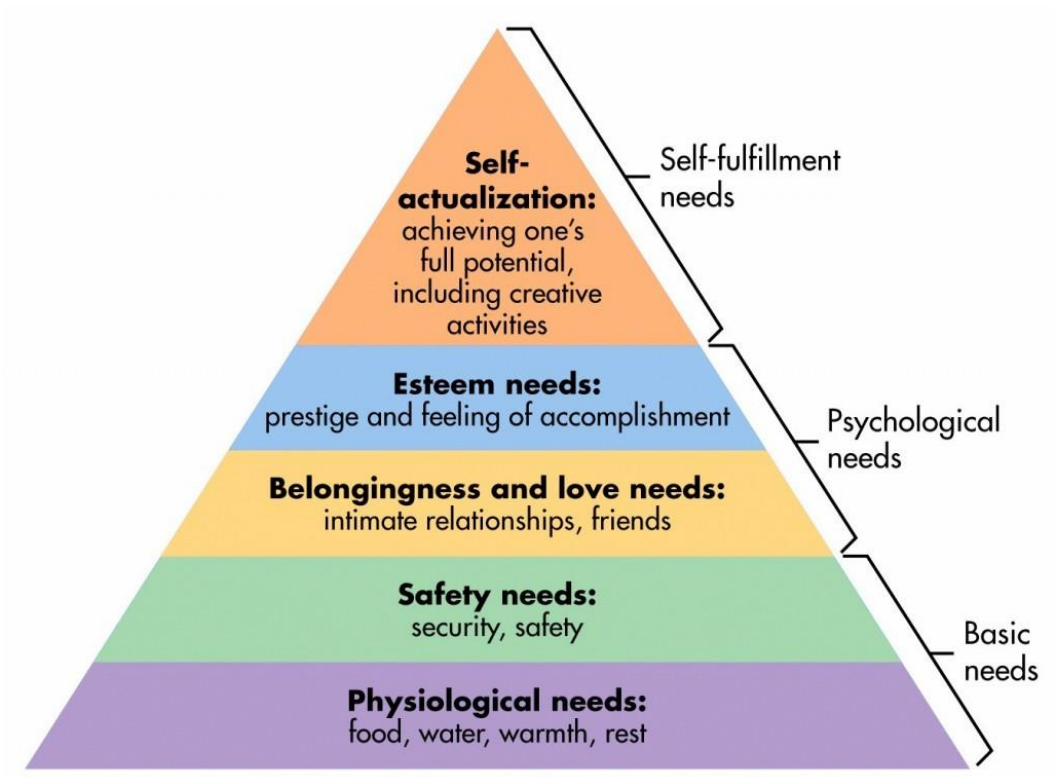
Educational systems and the 'others'

If we accept that education is created to help reproduce the middle class and prepare people to become obedient workers, we must also accept the damage that this does to those who do not fit into the societal ideal. Those who come from lower socioeconomic status areas, those who are any other race or culture than 'white Australian', those who are outspoken, those with mental illnesses, those with disabilities, those with complex lives… basically anyone who isn't white, middle class and obedient gets rejected by school.

I say rejected by schools quite deliberately, those who experience difficulties within schools are often not derisive and do not reject the concept of education as a whole. Peoples stories often show that it was not them who rejected school, but when they asked for help they received none and schools rejected them. Even after being rejected and having difficulties, people still believe in the narrative of school, they believe that school has the ability to widen their learning and help them navigate across social classes.

We believe its small acts of rejection over time that lead to the 'big issues' within education. That Absenteeism, disengagement and dropping out is linked to the students being rejected from schools.

Those who have difficult lives are often met with little help and forced to conform within impossible circumstances, there is no human connection nor understanding from the system, thus people start looking at other avenues outside school. Have a look at this:



This is Maslows hierarchy of needs. Basically its about how human beings need to be fed, safe, happy and loved in order to be the best they can be and learn to their full potential. It's also a big missing block within the school system, we find that peoples needs are being ignored across the board.

People are told that they can't eat when they are hungry, that they can't sleep in class… that they need to wait until lunch to pee… all of that harms someone's physiological needs and they can not earn under those conditions.

Peoples safety is often not addressed in school either, bullies are very common and schools often punish the victim and provide no support. In some cases it is the teachers who bully students, once again creating an impossible environment in which to learn.

Small actions like 'no talking in class!' can derail feelings of friendship within classrooms. There is also very little attention of friendship from teachers towards students, especially those who do not fit within norms. Those who do have mental health problems will often find them exacerbated within educational environments with very little understanding or leeway made by the school to accommodate their needs. Ultimately this means that many people do not receive the support for the school needed to achieve and become rejected from the system.

And when you are rejected from the system, if you're hungry, scared, tired and lonely as many people are, you turn somewhere else to fulfil your needs (as you rightly should). Issues such as disengagement, dropouts and people wagging school is much more to do with schools failure to be supportive and act 'human' than it ever does about that individual person.

Roses in Concrete- Jeff Duncan Andrade

School to Prison pipeline

Schools have more in common with prisons than the rampant industrialisation of their subjects. Essentially there has been a link found between schools and young people going to prison and violent acts. The biggest link that you can find with this is in America, however there are links in Australia as well. Essentially, as a result of school failures many kids are more likely to become criminals due to school policies and being rejected from schools.

In American school systems they have increased police presence in schools, thankfully I don't think (I bloody hope not) that Australian schools have much of a police presence, but it's been shown that having such a hard line in school can lead to a snowball effect where students are more likely to go to jail, and to reoffend later on.

Over the top rules and 'zero tolerance' policies have made the situation a lot worse. With a lack of understanding and punishment regardless of the situation, people are becoming more violent and more likely to end up in prison systems.

Schools force you to become violent. When schools ignore someone in need, someone becomes scared and desperate and will (naturally) lash out. In situations where someone has been bullied for a long period of time, the victim will lash out with high levels of violence, a lot higher than the original bully. The reason for this is because they want the bullying to stop and they snap. If you have been victimised by someone on a reoccurring basis and you get into a fight, the victim will fight the hardest and the quickest to end it quickly and get away… its very much like a cornered animal.

How schools respond to this is to punish quite harshly, which causes a cycle of having no support, lashing out and being sent away until you become involved in prison systems.

Zero Tolerance Story

"When I was in year 10 we all had to line up to go into the dinner hall. For whatever reason they put the menu with what they were serving that day at the front of the queue so I walked to the front to read it. As I was walking back a tiny year 8 kid shouted over to me "Hey stop trying to cut in the line you dick head!". I just told him to fuck off and mind his own business as it's the kind of school where if it looks like you're giving in to a younger kid without fighting your corner you won't hear the end of it. Then the little shit rugby tackled me but he was too small to knock me over so I just kind of stood there awkwardly as he tried to kick me. After a while I'd had enough so I grabbed him and picked him up, put him against the wall where he was standing before and turned to walk off. The headmaster was standing right in front of me and he'd been watching the whole thing. We both got sent to the "Reflection room" which is like a higher form of detention. The only time I got in trouble was for trying to walk away from a fight started by someone half my size who I probably could have hurt if I had wanted to."

"Thanks, headmaster. Now I know in the future that I should just deck the little bastard instead of being gentle because the punishment is going to be the same anyway."

And that is the exact reason why the school-to-prision pipeline exists- because school creates a situation where it is more logical to kick someone's ass than not too.

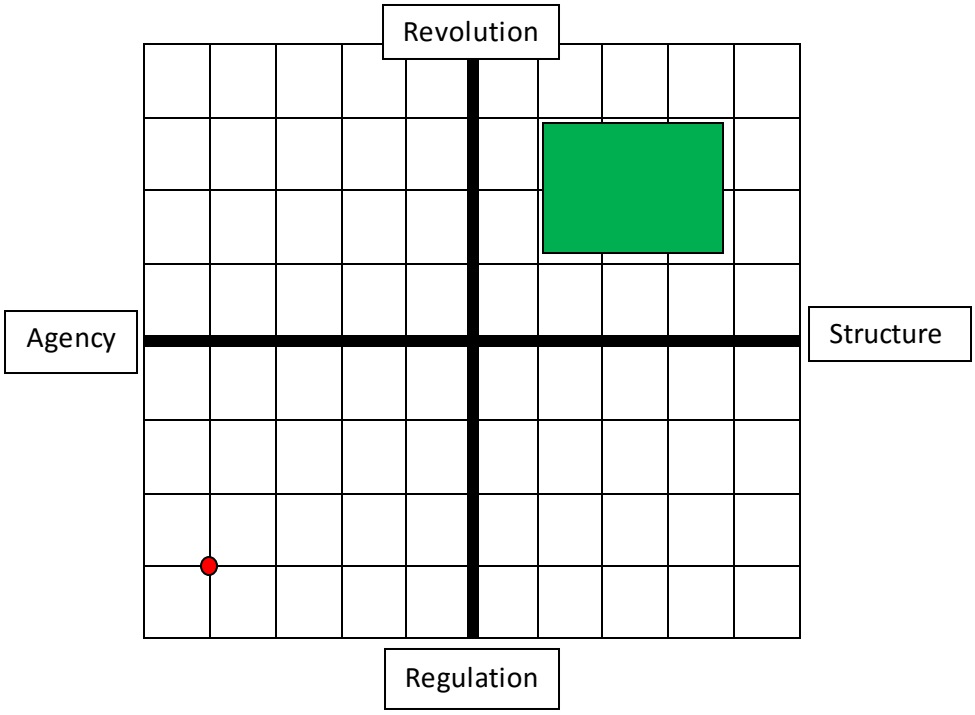
Deficit perspectives

One of the big things about schools is something we call deficit perspectives. The idea behind this is that the system fucks people over who are not middle class and white, this is a known fault of the system and something many people experience.

The question then becomes how to deal with the situation. Education's solution: Blame the poor suckers who are being victimised.

Which is essentially what deficit perspectives are, whether someone has lashed out at their bully, told their teacher to fuck off or is just not focusing as well as 'they should' the solution is to blame the individual. This means that we look at students as problems, like there is something wrong with them that needs to be fixed.

To analyse the reasons why they do this, lets return to the structure and agency graph.



The red dot is deficit perspectives. The focus is on an individual (the 'bad' student) and the school wishes to deal with the situation by the student 'falling in line'. As we know, the reasons why a student is acting out is usually very complex and made much worse by schools rejecting them and ignoring the situation.

Deficit perspectives come about because the system is ignoring its own fault. It has less to do with legitimately believing an individual student is the problem and much more about an inability to reflect critically upon itself. The green box in the chart is where most critical educational theories sit, they believe that school is the problem and we need to change to fix the issues, deficit perspectives are a way of distracting people from these issues/perspectives in order to not change.

Deficit perspectives are schools sticking their fingers in their ears and shouting 'I can't hear you' until you go away.

Educational Ideologies

First off we should have a quick talk about what are ideologies?

They are a set of opinions and beliefs about a subject that together form a more complete 'vision' about the topic.

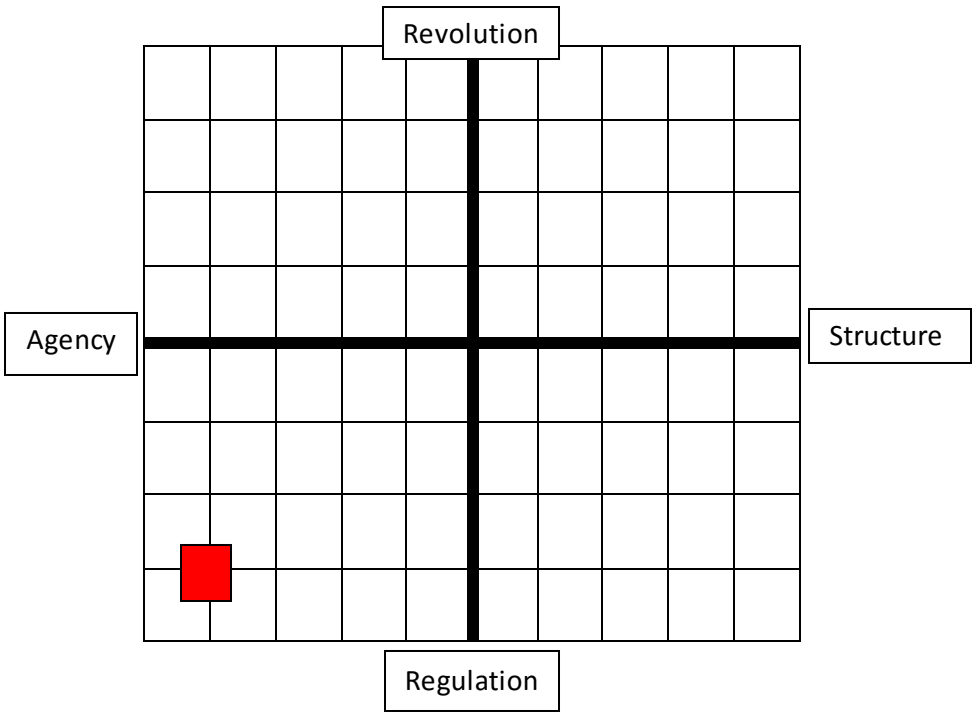
For example, Marxism can be considered an ideology. It is a set of opinions and beliefs about a subject that when combined become something more and special.

Today we are going to talk to you about some common ideologies that we see within education systems, and what ideology we believe is best.

Deficit Ideology:

Deficit ideology is where when there is an issue within education, the issue is immediately viewed at as being a problem and as if something is lacking in them or needs to be fixed. The students/problem is looked at as a deficit (something lacking). Hypothetical story time: A student in school isn't paying attention, talking in class and not completing her work. People who take on deficit ideologies would immediately see that student as a problem and will ask questions like 'what's the problem with her?' or simply yell at her to shut up and pay attention. In reality, the student needs glasses. Deficit ideology is the most common to come across and even those who are well meaning will often view those who deal with educational difficulties as 'problems' that need to be fixed. Deficit ideology is quite damaging as it both victimises people who are already coping with a lot of crap, in addition, it does nothing to address causal issues of educational difficulties.

On the structure vs agency grid deficit ideology looks like this:

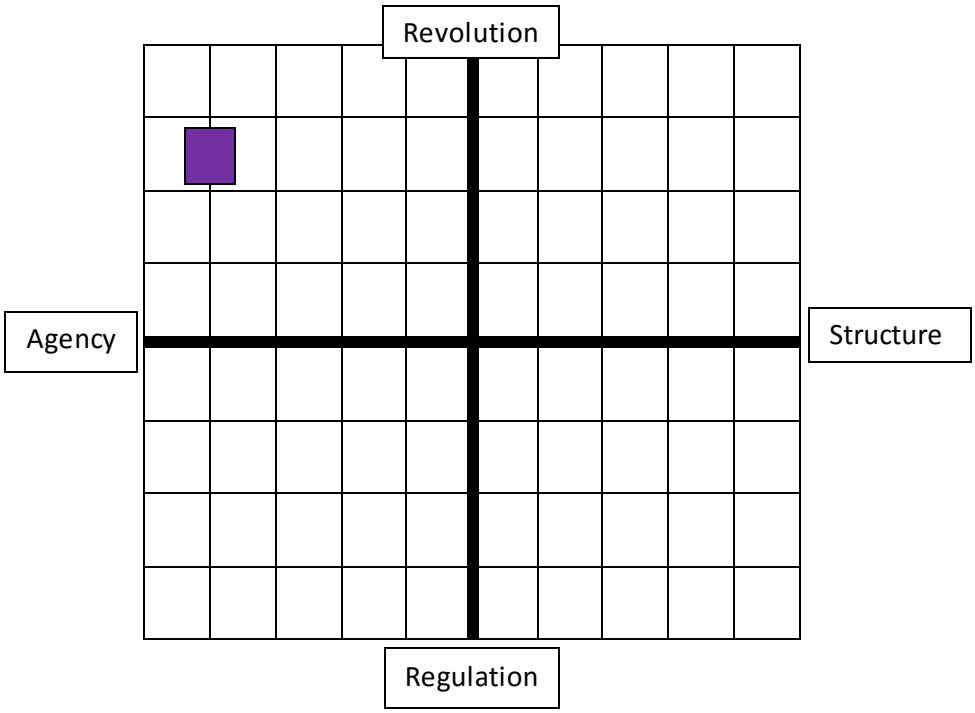


Deficit ideology focuses heavily on individuals and human agency and seeks to keep those people 'in line' and 'back in their place'

Grit Ideology

This is an ideology that is currently becoming popular and gaining traction within education on how to deal with people at educational disadvantage. The name 'grit' comes from the idea of dirt and grit ideology is the belief that in order for students at educational disadvantage to become successful they should be taught to become resilient and to be taught to overcome systemic barriers. Grit ideology acknowledges the existence and the difficulties of being at a disadvantage due to structural issues within the system. However, it falls short in a number of ways. Grit ideology can help an individual to overcome problems that it also places the blame straight back onto individual students. There becomes an expectation that what is required for success individuals to be resilient and get on with things. If a student then fails, it is because they didn't try hard enough and were not able to overcome. In addition, people dealing with educational inequalities are often the most resilient and hardworking people and the idea that they NEED to be taught to become something they already are is condescending. Lastly, Grit ideology doesn't address the systemic issues in place and instead focuses on individuals without addressing the cause of the individuals difficulties.

Grit Ideology on the structure vs agency grid looks like this:



Grit ideology is very focused on building an individual's agency and the idea of that individual revolutionising how they react and approach difficulties. However, there is a complete lack of focus on addressing structural issues causing difficulties.

Grit Ideology Ted Talk

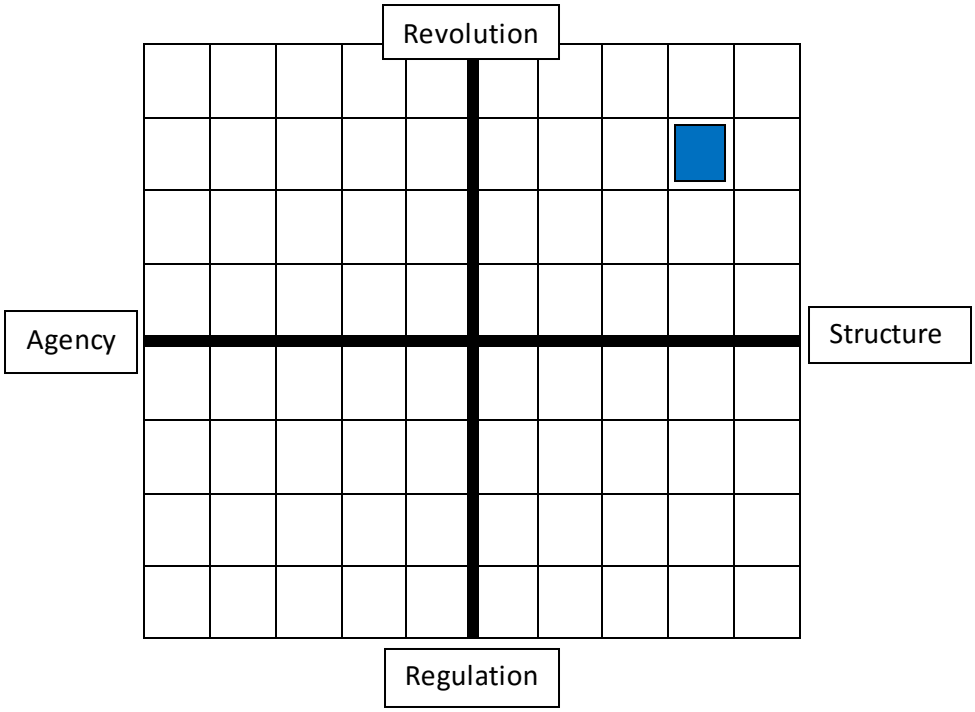
Structural Ideology

This is the ideology that our work sits within and (un)objectively the best ideology to have when addressing educational disadvantage.

Structural ideology is about addressing structural causes to educational disadvantage through changing the system and how it works. Structural ideology focuses not on individual people, but systemic changes that can be made in order to make things better for those at educational disadvantage. Structural ideology avoids focusing on individuals both as a way to address the causal root of disadvantage and in order to not victimise those affected by such issues.

This ideology is about wanting to make systemic changes and reorganise education into an institution that doesn't marginalize and pathologize students but addresses the individual needs of learners.

Structural Ideology on the structure vs agency grid looks like this:



One thing that's important to note about all these ideologies is that they don't just fit within education, you can see these ideologies in use and applied to a multitude of different situations within society. All we ask of you is that when you take a viewpoint about an issue that you keep this in mind and reflect on what ideology you are using.

Perspectives of the people

So, we did some research… Essentially we went out into the community and asked a ton of people their thoughts about school, how it has impacted them ect. Afterwards, we came back and took it all apart and tried to apply theoretical perspectives and see what people said about school.

We went to areas in Fremantle and into universities to ask people and contrasted this with p eople in Mandurah/Rockingham areas… the difference was staggering.

Middle Class: All Hail The Hallmark Card

When we collected data from higher socioeconomic areas we got a lot of responses like this:

'I love learning'

'Learn Love Learn'

'School is fun! Never stop learning'

Now, these kinds of responses are what I termed 'hallmark shit', comparing them to inspirational posts on Instagram or hallmark cards that sound nice but have very little meaning.

However, these messages do have meaning when we look at them critically… the meaning is just rather depressing.

Middle class perspectives on education and leaning seem to be thoughly entrenched in the school narrative. The idea that school is for learning, that it is fun and for broadening your mind that is entrenched in our culture. We have had a look at why this perspective exists, it's a combination of enlightenment thinking from the renaissance, the belief that life fulfilment comes from endeavours of the mind and more largely, a distraction from the process of conformity that school enforces on students.

Basically, the middle class seem to be thoughly brainwashed about the process and system of schools.

But why?

One reason about why middleclass people have more complete acceptance of the school narrative is because of their high levels of cultural capital.

Essentially, because these people are middle class, they likely had good experiences within school, live in a rich area and had little problems. And why would they have problems? School was created for them, they get to learn and be taught how to become management when their older and because they were normal, schools supported them and teachers helped them… for them, school was great.

The issue starts when they don't see that their experiences are not the experiences of everyone. There is a distinct lack of acknowledgement or understanding of experiences and perspectives outside their own. Middleclass people are more likely to express deficit perspectives when confronted by educational 'big issues' and are much more likely to focus on agency without acknowledgement of structural perspectives.

I do think it is important to note that I don't believe that middle class perspectives on education and malicious or wilfully ignorant, but rather the system works for them and they don't have any reason to reflect or change. These people are happy and feel successful about their own education and wish to see it in others. They are also the main vessel for the educational narrative within our society, they spread the message to their children, amongst themselves and towards others. These people become teachers, principals and parents. They continue to spread the messages, not due to a malicious effort, but an unconscious spread of beliefs across a culture.

That however, does not mean that the consequences are any less damaging

Lower class:

Our research in lower socioeconomic areas turned out much more interesting and varied responses on what people understood, thought about and how they were impacted by educational systems. We got responses along the lines of these:

'I used to believe I had to get good grades to get anywhere in life but have recently figured that my beliefs were false'

'Made me realise I don't have to finish school to succeed'

'Make me realise that all that matters is your own happiness.'

Those in lower SES areas reported much more difficulties within school and that these difficulties still impacted on how they viewed themselves in adulthood, there were many reports of people being isolated and ignored by their schools. There were more reports of teachers ignoring bullying or teachers being bullies.

Lower SES areas also showed higher levels of awareness of structural issues within educational system and had a tendency towards actions and resistance against school structures. This was not particularly surprising, however, what was interesting that even those who could be considered 'successful' in school in low SES areas showed awareness and action towards structural issues regardless of whether it had impacted them individually or not.

One reoccurring pattern was one of continued hope and belief in the power of education. This differed from the hallmark messages of the middle classes in that this occurred not because the people had a good school experience, but despite the difficulties in school, people within lower SES areas still held learning in high esteem and had strong beliefs about the power of education as navigational capital. This further helps show that issues within education are not caused by disillusionment with the ideals of education, and is more likely that s we have theorised, That schools disengaged from students, withdrawing their support.

When compared to those from the middle class groups, low SES groups showed less deficit perspectives. However, there was still many who spoke of the importance of agency even when acknowledging structural issues within education and people from those areas showed an equal balance between acknowledging structure and agency

Overall lower SES persons seem better informed and more active when it comes to educational disadvantage and despite the difficulties that they have experiences, many people are still willing to commit themselves to education.

Recommendations of the research

So, this is the part of the book where we try and offer solutions. I'll start of by saying that this is a problem that has been going on for over a hundred years, there is clearly no easy-fix solution to the problems of educational inequality. However, we feel that this book is part of the solution. Whilst we are critical of educational systems, we still believe in the power of learning. The biggest issue is that institutionalisation within schools is not well known and not acknowledged by the masses and people internalise failures rather than see them for what they are: a broken system. So our biggest recommendation is for people to learn and talk about institutionalised educational systems and how it impacts people.

Public

As we can see from the research conducted with people from higher SES areas, the idea of the school narrative of education as a place that broadens horizons, helps prepare you for adulthood and as a caring place, is a very pervasive one that shapes how many feel about school. This school narrative is linked to deficit perspectives and a lack of action taken towards fixing structural issues that cause educational disadvantage.

We believe that two main things need to happen in the public sphere in order to address educational disadvantage and work towards building a better school system.

Number one is awareness. There are too many people who are simply unaware of institutionalised education, or have a vague understanding but believe they are not affected by it. This can also lend itself to developing deficit perspectives when someone is unaware of structural issues and are unable to see beyond their own experiences at school.

We propose creating and spreading a counter narrative and creating awareness about institutionalised education through actions such as these books, to get the conversation out there and have people talking and aware of what occurs. Without the awareness no change can occur and there will be more resistance against much needed change and 'in fighting' between public and disadvantaged students and rather than a combined effort towards instructional change.

Teachers

I have done my education degree at university, but it wasn't until I started this research that I saw how the school narrative, institutionalisation and deficit perspectives are ingrained in educational systems, including universities and educational research and recommendations in how to teach in the classroom. A few examples:

When dealing with disengagement, we are taught to create more interesting lessons with pictures and group activities. There is no talk about how systems cause the issue or how to improve/ protect students from the system and a complete focus on individuals/small time stuff.

When wanting to talk about systemic issues with education, you can be completely ignored, there is little space within the degree to talk about and come up with solutions to these issues.

Teachers are caught up in this school narrative themselves and there is no talk nor support of how to address the issues that have such a huge impact upon students. This just furthers this cycle into the next generation of teachers and students and needs to stop.

Here are some of my recommendations for teacher practice and pre-service teacher education that I believe will make a positive difference in addressing educational inequalities.

1. Universities need to address systemic institutional issues and practical solutions in their education degrees so new generations of teachers will be aware and work towards addressing issues. Systemic issues need to be spoken about often, in many different units and in context so it becomes normal practice to critically question education and work towards better solutions for students
2. Teachers in practice should include more humanity within their practice. First focus should be on student health and wellbeing before everything else. Maslows hierarchy should be addressed at all times and spaces
3. Students should not be viewed as 'lessor' to the teacher. Students are of equal value and importance and both people are working towards a common goal, learning. Its important that students agency is never infringed upon through the enforcement of teacher authority.
4. Students should always be viewed as capable and deficit perspectives should be forgotten. Have academically vigorous work, talk to students as if they will understand and help support them to get there. Your job is to not just believe they can learn, but know it so deeply you won't question it, even when they do.
5. Students should be viewed as partners for learning and for creating systemic change. It is important for you to teach students about the institutionalisation of schools and how the system will negatively affect them.
6. Within practice, it's important to acknowledge and USE the individuality of students, their passions, choices to help apply it to their learning and help them become the passionate interesting people they are
7. When a student is being bullied, support them and address the bullies behaviour to the bully, not the victim- to often it is the victims who move class or are punished, don't be that person, don't ignore it and address the issue with the bully
8. When students misbehave, to correct the behaviours do not become authoritarian. Talk to students about what is causing the behaviour in a non-judgemental way and see what you can both do to correct the causation of the behaviour.
9. Build strong relationships with your students. You are human beings and school is not a space in which to forget that.

Students

It is incredibly important for students to be aware of the structural issues within education that cause disadvantage. It's very common for students to internalise deficit ideology and believe that they are stupid, unworthy, 'bad' ect. We believe that a large part of combating this internalised deficit perspectives is for students to be aware of institutionalised education and to understand that issues such as disengagement and poor achievement are not the result of being a 'loser' but the results of a broken system.

This is part of the reason why this book and the *Underground Schools Project* was created, to educate students about the issues so they would no longer believe that the blame for school issues rests solely on their own heads.

We also believe that students and people from lower SES areas have deep understanding and experience with institutionalised education and have a lot to contribute in actively creating better systems in place for schools. Through our own experiences, giving people the knowledge and tools about their own oppression leads to those people building further agency and creating change in their own lives and out in the wider community.

Students being aware and taking action also helps create a more informed public and better informed teachers as new generation's graduate schools and make their way into the world, to become parents, teachers and policy makers.

Short term we could also encourage students who have ideas and thoughts to say about their own school experiences or actions to take to create awareness and structural change to contact us and see how we can help support you in doing so.

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has'

Margaret Mead

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